

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1409

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM THAI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3868

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TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PFOR, TH, US

SUBJ: STATE OF GOVERNMENT FORMATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S.

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF : BANGKOK 3784

SUMMARY: THE CONSERVATIVE PARLIAMENTARY FORCES, RESPONDING TO GUIDANCE FROM THE THAI NATION PARTY (TNP) DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE DETERMINATION IN NOT ALLOWING THE DEMOCRAT PARTY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. AFTER SIX WEEKS OF MANEUVERING, THE DEMOCRATS LOST THE CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED VOTE OF CONFIDENCE MARCH 6. THE WAY
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IS NOW OPEN FOR A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WHICH MOST OBSERVERS

BELIEVE WILL SEE KHUKRIT PRAMOT AS THE PRIME MINISTER, IF KHUKRIT'S CONDITIONS ARE NOT TOO STEEP. THE CONSERVATIVES, HOWEVER, MAY BE ABLE TO ESTABLISH A GOVERNMENT WITHOUT HIM; THOUGH THAT TASK WOULD BE MORE DIFFICULT WITHOUT SAP'S 18 VOTES. THE LAST SIX WEEKS OF PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVERS HAVE ILLUSTRATED HOW THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE CAN BECOME A POLITICAL PING PONG BALL. FEW ARE WILLING TO SUPPORT US PUBLICLY. END SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION: AFTER SIX WEEKS OF PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVERING, THE DEMOCRAT PARTY UNDER SENI-PRAMOT FORMED A GOVERNMENT BUT FAILED TO RECEIVE A CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 187 OF THE 1974 CONSTITUTION, THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN CABINET REVERTS TO AN INTERIM STATUS UNTIL PARLIAMENT PICKS A REPLACEMENT CABINET.

2. POLITICAL ETIQUETTE NOW DICTATES THAT THE SECOND LARGEST PARTY IN PARLIAMENT, SOCIAL JUSTICE, HAVE A CHANCE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. IF IT IS UNSUCCESSFUL OR WITHDRAWS, THAI NATION, AS THE THIRD LARGEST PARTY, WILL HAVE ITS CHANCE.

3. WHAT NEXT?: THAI POLITICANS EXPECT SOCIAL JUSTICE TO DECLINE TO FORM A GOVERNMENT ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE PARTY LEADER, THAWIT KLINPRATHUM, WAS UNSUCCESSFUL IN HIS PERSONAL ELECTION BID. FURTHERMORE, CONSERVATIVE ASPIRATIONS FOR POWER ARE CHANNLED THROUGH THE TNP OF PRAMAN ADIREKSAN. TNP HAS HELD EXTENSIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP) OF KHUKRIT PRAMOT, WITH THE OBJECT OF HAVING KHUKRIT HEAD A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT (BANGKOK 2860, 3126, 3551, AND 3690). IN THE PAST SIX WEEKS, SAP HAS COOPERATED WITH THE CONSERVATIVES TO ELECT SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTY LEADER PRASIT KANCHANAWAT AS SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT. KHUKRIT'S SPEECH MARCH 6 WAS ONE OF THE STRONGEST AGAINST THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN COALITION. THIS COOPERATION MAY CONTINUE AND RESULT IN A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WITH TNP AND SAP LEADERSHIP. IF THE GLUE HOLDS, THE CONSERVATIVES MAY BE ABLE TO FORM A CABINET WITHIN PRAMAN'S PREDICTION OF ONE WEEK, BUT IF SENI'S EXPERIENCE IS ANY EXAMPLE, THE PROCESS COULD WELL TAKE LONGER.

4. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT KHUKRIT HAS INCREASED THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH HE WILL ACCEPT THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP. CONFIDENTIAL

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SAP'S PAUL SITHI-AMNUAI TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER FEB 20 THAT KHUKRIT WOULD BECOME PRIME MINISTER ONLY IF THE CONSERVATIVES ENGINEERED AN OVERWHELMING VOTE OF SUPPORT (BANGKOK 3042). SENATOR LEK WANIT-ANGKUN WHO HAS BEEN A CONDUIT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SAP, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER MARCH 1 THAT KHUKRIT WILL AGREE TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER IF HE HAS A FREE HAND IN SELECTING HIS CABINET, AND IS NOT BOUND TO ACCEPT CABINET MEMBERS FROM THE PARTIES WHO SUPPORT HIM. THE LURE OF OFFICE,

HOWEVER, COULD PERSUADE KHUKRIT TO BE LESS RIGID.

5. IF KHUKRIT IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY PERSUADED, THAI NATION COULD STILL GO ON WITHOUT HIM TO HEAD A CONSERVATIVE COALITION, BUT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RISK BEING A MINORITY ONE. A KEY FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL TOLD US MARCH 7 THAT SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY LEADER SAWET PIANPHONGSAN SAID HE WOULD NOT JOIN OTHER CONSERVATIVES. PRESUMING SAWET MEANT WHAT HE SAID, WITHOUT SOCIAL AGRARIAN, THE CONSERVATIVE CORE PARTIES (THAI NATION, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SOCIAL NATIONALIST) HAVE ONLY 89 SEATS. THEY COULD COUNT ON SOME 30 VOTES FROM THE 34 WHICH THE "UNDER TEN" PARTIES CONTROL. THE SMALL PARTIES HAVE A STRONG FEAR OF NEW ELECTIONS WHICH SHOULD WELD THEM TO A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WITH SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS. THAT TOTALS ONLY 119 SEATS, HOWEVER. THE CONSERVATIVES NEED KHUKRIT.

6. SINCE THE ELCTIONS WERE SIX WEEKS AGO, ESTABLISHMENT FORCES WILL WEIGH IN ON THE SIDE OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. KHUKRIT WOULD THUS BE PRESSURED TO MODERATE HIS CONDITIONS. THE KING RETURNED TO BANGKOK FROM CHIANG MAI MARCH 4, PROBABLY TO BE CLOSER TO THE DEVELOPING SITUATION. ALTHOUGH GENERAL KRIT SIWARA IS IN THE MIDST OF A TRIP TO INDONESIA, HE HAD PREVIOUSLY SPOKEN TO KHUKRIT ABOUT ACCEPTING THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP.

7. UNLIKE THE DAY THE PARLIAMENT SELECTED SENI PRAMOT AS PRIME MINISTER, THERE WERE NO DEMONSTRATIONS WHEN THE SENI CABINET FELL MARCH 6. PERHAPS THE PUBLIC IS BECOMING BORED WITH EXTENDED PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVERINGS. IT COULD BE WILLING AT THIS TIME TO ACCEPT WHATEVER GOVERNMENT IS FORMED.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES.
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THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE BECAME A BARGAINING CHIP IN THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR FORMING THE DEMOCRAT-SOCIAL AGRARIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT, AND THEN IN THE DEBATE OVER THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY. THAI POLITICAL PARTIES MANIPULATED THE ISSUE OF AMERICAN TROOPS WITHOUT MUCH REGARD FOR ITS SUBSTANCE. DURING THE MARCH 6 DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, WE HAD NO PUBLIC DEFENDERS.

9. THE DEMOCRATS, WHO LIKE THE CONSERVATIVES BASICALLY SHARE OUR FOREIGN POLICY VIEWPOINTS, FELT COMPELLED TO COME UP WITH AN 18 MONTH DEADLINE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF OUR TROOPS. THE CONSERVATIVES, NOT WANTING TO APPEAR SOFT ON THE U.S. PRESENCE, MAY THINK IT NECESSARY TO SHORTEN THAT TIMETABLE IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THEIR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. SECGEN OF THE CHAT THAI PARTY (CHARTCHAI) HAS, IN FACT, JUST REITERATED PUBLICLY A ONE-YEAR DEADLINE FOR TOTAL

WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES. THE EMERGING POLITICAL PROCESS IN
THAILAND IS LIKELY TO RULE OUT MANY OPTIONS WITH REGARD TO OUR
TROOP PRESENCE.
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